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Military operations in East Timor during 1987

Indonesian red-berets of Kopassus, arriving at Baucau airport in July 1987, with the assignment to capture Falintil commander Xanana, dead or alive.

Two major military operations were launched by the Indonesian army during 1986 and 1987, causing many civilian casualties among the Timorese.

Since the invasion in December 1975, the Indonesian armed forces have repeatedly launched small, medium or large-scale attacks, either against the Fretilin guerrillas or attacking innocent East Timorese in the countryside. In the words of Inacio Moura, who left East Timor last December after working for several years in the East Timor 'provincial' administration, entire villages have been decimated. "The exact number of those killed is difficult to know, but an estimate of that tragic number may be put at around 200,000 victims, given the huge proportion of the population who have disappeared." Moura estimates that the Indonesian armed forces have lost more than 15,000 troops killed in the fighting with the Timorese resistance:

> The (Indonesian) soldiers are tired of so much war. They are there but thinking of their families. They die, or are mutilated, and afterwards live a miserable life. Many soldiers say: 'We come here to die while the generals in Jakarta are living at our expence.'

The military command structure in East Timor

At times when there are no large-scale operations under way, Indonesia's territorial army in East Timor consists of between 10,000 and 15,000 soldiers. During operations, divisions and battalions from all parts of the country are flown in. Virtually every military unit in Indonesia has had combat experience in East Timor.

According to a report from East Timor on the military situation in November, women's military units were brought in to take over some of the territorial duties, such as population control.

The territorial command in East Timor is the Komando Resor Militer, or Military Resort Command, known as Korem 164/Wira Dharma, with its headquarters in Dili. The present commander is Infantry Colonel Machfud who took over from Colonel Yunus Yosfiah at the end of 1987.

In 1983, a special command was set up for East Timor, the Komando Operasi Keamanan East Timor, or Security Operations Command for East Timor, known as Kopskam Timtim. Kopskam Timtim is always under the command of the commander of the first division of Kostrad, the army's strategic reserve corps, the best trained and equipped corps in the Indonesian army. Unlike Korem 164/Wira Dharma which is under the Military Regional Command IX/Udayana based in Bali, Kopskam Timtim is under the armed forces commander-in-chief. The present Kopskam commander is Brigadier-General Mantiri. The previous commander, Brigadier-General Sugito later moved to the prestigious post of Jakarta military commander and is now commander of Kostrad.

The 1986-87 military operation

In June 1986, Indonesia launched an operation called Operasi Kikis, or Operation Extinction which lasted one year and was terminated in May 1987. In July 1987, a special operation was launched with the arrival of one thousand special red-beret troops, under the command of

Colonel Soenarto. The primary objective of this operation was to track down and eliminate the Fretilin guerrilla leader, Kay Rala Xanana Gusmao, who has led Falintil, the armed resistance in East Timor, since 1979. In December 1987, Colonel Soenarto and his troops were withdrawn, having failed to achieve their goal.

A red-beret (Kopassus) commander giving instructions to his men, out on operations in a mountainous part of Baucau region.

Operasi Kikis

In a document written by Xanana in May 1987, the Falintil commander made the following assessment of this operation:

> Following guerrilla attacks, wherever they have taken place, the occupying forces always carry out reprisals of many kinds against the defenceless population. This is firstly in order to terrorise the people even further, secondly, to implant the idea that if there were no armed resistance the population would not be suffering the consequences, and thirdly, to impress upon the guerrillas that no Indonesian soldier will be killed without someone from among the Timorese population being killed as well.

In other words, Operation Extinction was a response and retaliation to mounting Fretilin actions all over the country. By inflicting harsh punishments and on-the-spot executions on innocent villagers, the army intended to set an example while at the same time spreading fear. The aim was to alienate the population from the guerrillas by blaming the latter for the sufferings and hardship caused by the Indonesian troops.

In addition, an overwhelming military presence was needed before and during the general elections in East Timor on 23 April 1987. In East Timor, a general election is nothing less than a military exercise, during which the entire population is herded into the polling booths.

As with previous operations, Operation Extinction involved troops brought in fresh from various regions. This time they included Zipur Battalion 9, a combat battalion consisting of special commandos and army engineers, Battalion 744 from Central Sulawasi, Battalion 527 from the Brawijaya East Java Division, Battalion 745 from North Sulawesi, Battalion 714 from South Sulawesi, along with other battalions that have not been identified. According to Fretilin, altogether thirty-six battalions were deployed in the operation, a total of about 27,000 additional troops.

There were reports of many clashes between the guerrillas and Indonesian troops. Skirmishes occurred almost everywhere, with the focus on the eastern sector.

In late 1986 when fresh troops were disembarked at Tacitolu and Areia Branca, west of Dili, the troops moved quickly south. The first clashes were reported in Zumalai, Bobonaro and Atsabe, all in the western sector. In the following months, the troops moved eastward where the guerrillas have many strongholds.

After the heavy bombing raids of the late 1970s, the guerrillas learned one important lesson - not to set up permanent bases as they are a sitting target for jet-fighters and bombers. Inacio Moura stated in various interviews with the Portuguese press that one need only go to Baucau to see the military base from which US-manufactured planes take off daily to bomb Fretilin positions and zones occupied by the resistance. After a raid, ground forces are sent into the bombed area but as soon as they leave, the guerrillas return to their former positions.

When the war zone moved east to the Los Palos region along the key road from Baucau to Vikeke, many Indonesian troops were ambushed. Refugees report that the Indonesians have virtually given up trying to control the road. People say that till 4 pm, the Indonesians rule, then Fretilin takes over.

Many documents have reached the Fretilin office in Lisbon reporting clashes during this period, and exposing the brutality of the Indonesian troops. One event in Iliomar, in the eastern sector, shortly before the elections, is typical:

Some time in late February or early March 1987, 87

Indonesian troops using radio and binoculars to monitor a bombing raid on guerrilla positions near Lakluta, in March 1987.

troops of Zipur Battalion 9 entered Iliomar and forced the townspeople to gather in front of the military post. After threats of various kinds, seventeen Timorese, including Jaime da Costa and Martinho Hornai, were bayonetted to death.

Falintil guerrillas avoided direct confrontation with the enemy who deployed a far greater number of troops than Falintil. But the guerrillas launched counter-attacks whenever conditions were favourable. Nearing the end of Operation Extinction, in April and May, many Indonesian units were ambushed and hit by the guerrillas. On 12 May, guerrillas succeeded in shooting down an Indonesian helicopter in the Barike district.

Details of confrontations in April-May 1987

3 April
Fighting in Los Palos. One Indonesian officer was killed.

17 April
Two dead and two wounded Indonesian soldiers transported to Dili.

This photo was taken in Luro region, near Los Palos, an area of 'unrest'. Indonesian soldiers appear to be inspecting rows of Timorese men. The purpose of the inspection is not clear. The accompanying note says that all travel in East Timor is strictly supervised and requires a travel permit (surat jalan). This may be a briefing before the men go to work in the fields.

21 and 22 April
Fighting on the north coast of Lautem, directly north of Los Palos. Three guerrillas were killed and their weapons captured on the first day. Nine Indonesian soldiers were killed and their weapons seized on the second day.

Indonesian forces patrolling in the Lacluta area, in March 1987.

Indonesian red-berets arriving during the night in Baucau airport, to participate in Colonel Soenarto's operation.

23 April
On polling day, Falintil attacked Raimero village, in Same. Two soldiers were killed and one wounded; three weapons were seized. A similar attack in Hatudo failed.
Six dead Indonesian soldiers arrived in Dili.

4 May
Armed encounter with Battalion 714 in Liaruka/Ossu. Four Indonesian soldiers were killed and their weapons seized. One guerrilla was killed.

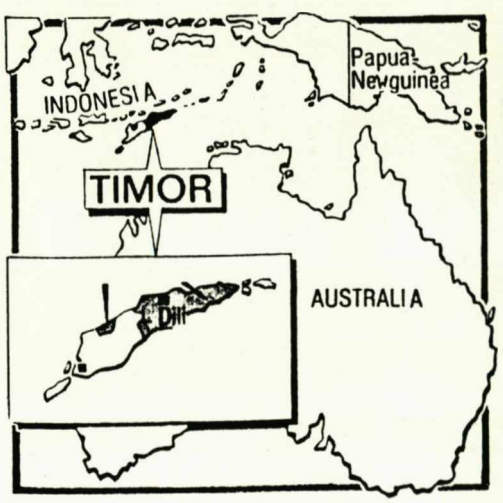
10 May
Six dead Indonesian soldiers were brought into Dili from Betano on the south coast.

12 May
An army helicopter was shot down in Barike. According to some reports, it was hit and made a forced landing, then took off and was hit again and crashed.

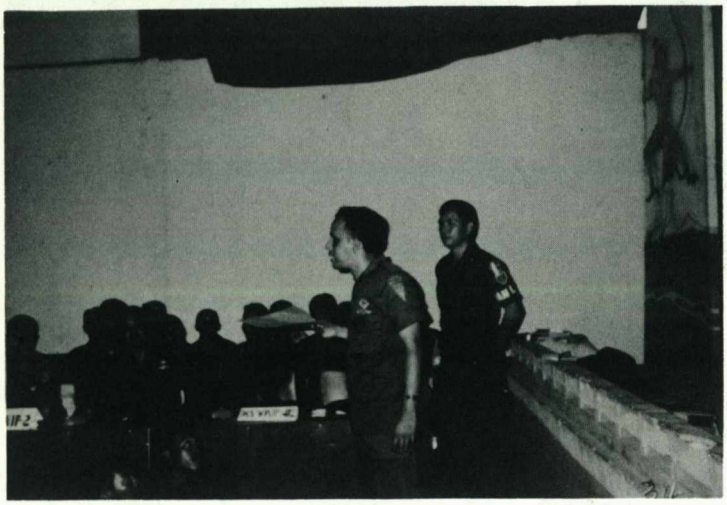
17 May
A Falintil unit intercepted a bus in Los Palos.

* * *

Although Operation Extinction came to an end in May, there was a report that in August 1987, forty-six armoured cars with heavy artillery units manned by 7,200 soldiers arrived in East Timor. This was said to be in preparation for a plan to end armed resistance in East Timor by September 1988.



The search for Xanana Gusmao



A senior Indonesian officer giving instructions to men of a Kostrad battalion, in an army barracks in Baucau, in September 1987.

One thousand red-beret Kopassus troops were flown in to Baucau and Los Palos by Hercules aircraft on 11 and 12 July 1987, under the command of Colonel Soenarto. The sole assignment of the operation was to capture Falintil commander, Xanana Gusmao.

The Soenarto operation appears to have been a combined intelligence-commando operation, the intention being to lure the guerrilla leader into negotiations through a church intermediary and to capture Xanana during the talks. This never happened. Indeed Falintil intelligence was clearly forewarned of the plans, and sent information abroad very quickly about the operation. Later, Falintil sent out photographs of the troops arriving, some of which are reproduced on these pages, which only confirms that they have well-established lines of communication within enemy ranks, keeping them well informed of every Indonesian move.

The Soenarto troops were concentrated in the east where they hunted the elusive guerrilla leader. Soenarto sent out secret agents to mingle among the Timorese to hunt down Xanana. One source stated that some commandos had been given lessons in Portuguese to help them mix better among the Timorese.

In August, five of Soenarto's men were killed in Los Palos and twenty were seriously wounded in an ambush.

A combat-ready Kopassus unit, flown in to East Timor from Java, in July 1987.

The wounded were flown back to Jakarta. Those guerrillas who were captured were immediately interrogated for information of Xanana's whereabouts, but without success. On 16 and 17 October, a fresh batch of red-berets arrived in Baucau and military equipment was unloaded at Lautem harbour.

After failing in his mission, Colonel Soenarto returned to Jakarta on 12 December. Two weeks later, armed forces commander-in-chief, General Benny Murdani, stated that it would still take several years to put an end to armed resistance in East Timor. He estimated that there were about five hundred armed guerrillas in action. The report he received from Soenarto must have been very discouraging.

Source: **Nakroma,** Nos 1 and 2, published by Fretilin Information Office (GIF), Lisbon, and documents from East Timor, obtained from GIF and logged in various Memos published by **East Timor News.**

Newly-arrived Indonesian red-berets at Baucau airport, receiving army insignia from local territorial troops, in July 1987.

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